United Nations A/C.1/53/PV.1

General Assembly
Fifty-third session

Official Records

First Committee
1st Meeting
Wednesday, 9 September 1998, 3.40 p.m.
New York

Temporary Chairman: Mr. Opertti . . . . . (Uruguay, President of the General Assembly)

The meeting was called to order at 3.40 p.m.

Election of the Chairman of the First Committee

The Temporary Chairman (*interpretation from Spanish*): Rule 103 of the rules of procedure, as amended by General Assembly resolution 52/163 of 15 December 1997, provides that each Main Committee shall elect a Chairman, three Vice-Chairmen and a Rapporteur. These officers shall be elected on the basis of equitable geographical distribution, experience and personal competence. The elections shall be held by secret ballot unless the Committee decides otherwise in an election where only one candidate is standing. The nomination of each candidate shall be limited to one speaker, after which the Committee shall immediately proceed to the election.

Furthermore, rule 110 of the rules of procedure provides that congratulations to the officers of a Main Committee shall not be expressed except by the Chairman of the previous session — or, in his absence, by a member of his delegation — after all the officers of the Committee have been elected.

This meeting has been convened for the election of the Chairman of the First Committee. Are there any nominations?

Mr. Parnohadiningrat (Indonesia): Let me, first of all, express the gratitude of the delegation of Indonesia for your unanimous election, Sir, as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

In my capacity as Acting Chairman of the First Committee at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, it is my pleasure to present the candidature of Ambassador André Mernier for the chairmanship of the First Committee.

Ambassador Mernier, currently the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, is a widely recognized and highly regarded expert with lengthy experience in disarmament matters. After a distinguished career in the Belgian armed forces and in the private sector, he joined the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 1975. He was posted to Amsterdam, Beirut, the Belgian delegation to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Washington and East Berlin. Subsequently, he was appointed Consul General in West Berlin and Ambassador in Seoul.

From 1994 to 1996, he was Head of the Disarmament Section of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Brussels. Since 1996, he has been the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

Ambassador Mernier was Vice-Chairman of the First Committee during the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. He is a very active member of the Group of Experts on Small Arms. He was Secretary-General to the Preparatory Conference for the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines, which was held in Brussels in November 1997. He is also member of the Council of Foundation of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

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Obviously, Ambassador Mernier is a very experienced diplomat with a professional profile well suited to the chairmanship of this Committee. I therefore trust that this candidature can be accepted by consensus.

The Temporary Chairman (*interpretation from Spanish*): Mr. André Mernier of Belgium has been nominated by the representative of Indonesia. Since only one candidate has been nominated, I propose that, under rule 103, the Committee decide not to hold a secret ballot. I see no objection.

It was so decided.

The Temporary Chairman (*interpretation from Spanish*): I therefore declare Mr. André Mernier of Belgium elected Chairman of the First Committee by acclamation.

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.